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THE RELATION OF THE PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOL TO THE SYSTEM OF WHICH IT IS A PART

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In this article the claim is not made that the activities of our local high school are any more original in their conception than those of hundreds of other similar institutions. The instances of achievement are but typical of what has doubtless been done elsewhere. However, they give concrete illustration to some of the definite ways in which the high school may function in its relation to the work which the school system is trying to accomplish. Each locality, with its different traditions and special local environment, may find different and better ways of like achievement. But the claim that is made is that educators should be very conscious of these new relationships.

We have no junior high school, nor intermediate schools, nor departmentalized grammar grades. But we are trying by other means to make a natural transition from Grade VIII to the high school. For a number of terms the superintendent and the principal of the high school have held meetings in the various grade schools for the purpose of discussing the high-school curricula. Eighth-grade pupils and their parents have

been invited to these gatherings by the grade-school principals. The series has occupied several successive evenings, one meeting being held in each natural geographical section of the city. In some instances two or more schools have combined in a meeting at one convenient center. In a very informal way the superintendent has explained to the parents and their children the value of a high-school education, from several definite standpoints, and the necessity for getting a good start in high-school work in the new surroundings in which the students will be placed. In his talk he usually cites concrete illustrations of the successes of certain high-school students in after-life and of the failures of other pupils who have made a false start in high school. He always points out some of the misconceptions that parents have regarding the high school and some of the mistakes made in the selection of courses by entering pupils. For instance, girls have often entered the commercial curriculum because the "other girls" in their set have chosen it, and later have found that they wish to go to normal school or college and must change to another curriculum. Boys too often follow the selection of a popular playmate and choose the mechanic-arts curriculum rather than the classical, or vice versa. Others decide to go to business college or take some other vocational course, and by so doing often make a costly mistake. No one has told them that we have an arrangement by which a general course, a household-arts course, or a mechanic-arts course can be taken for a year, and that the decision for a college-preparatory or vocational course can then be made without entailing any loss of time or school credits. Others think that because they must go to work and earn money their education must cease. They do not realize that part-time courses in the high school will enable them to work for pay and continue their studies.

By the discussion of such topics as these the superintendent prepares the way for a talk by the principal of the high school

on the specific content of the various curricula. In this talk the principal shows what considerations should guide parents and pupils in their selection of a particular high-school curriculum. He points out the proper course for pupils who are seeking a sound, general education without yet having any special idea as to a vocation; for those who think that they may enter colleges or scientific schools; for those who wish to go to a normal school; for those who know that they are destined for a business career or for a trade; for those who wish to specialize in household arts, and for those who wish part-time courses. Cautions are given to prevent pupils who are notably weak in English from undertaking the usual four-year course in Latin; but pupils who have excelled in the grades are urged to consider seriously taking up college-preparatory work. An attempt is made to keep pupils from making a decision in favor of special vocational work before such decision is necessary; but such decisions are advised in the case of those who have planned to leave school at once without any vocational or prevocational training. The discussions from the floor and in the ensuing private conversations are frequently concerned with preparation for a particular college or normal school. Often a parent believes that his child has a particular liking for some line of work (such as mechanics, art, or music) and seeks advice in the matter.

After these meetings, which have been held about a month before the end of the term, the grade-school principals and eighth-grade teachers are asked to see that a "selection card" is signed by the parent of each pupil likely to enter high school. This card gives the choice of a high-school curriculum (classical, or scientific, or commercial, etc.) and the choice of any particular optional studies allowed in the curriculum selected. On the information secured from these cards is based the arrangement of first-term classes. Our experience has been that there are now fewer requests for change of course after

entrance, and we believe that school enrolment has been sustained. In a recent term, instead of holding the series of meetings outlined, high-school teachers were sent to discuss these matters before the eighth-grade classes. The results did not appear to be as beneficial as those secured by the other method.

We are attempting to adjust the entering pupil more quickly and thoroughly to his new high-school environment. Upon entering high school, the pupil probably has four subject teachers, where hitherto he has had one. Moreover, his grade teacher has probably been friend and adviser as well as teacher, having observed him at study and from the angles of the several subjects in which he has been her pupil. Now he sees his section-room teacher but a short time each day, and instead of remaining in one room he makes frequent shifts to the various parts of the school building. Instead of seeing many friends continuously, he comes in contact with a few occasionally. Many pupils in this situation are bewildered intellectually and lost socially. No wonder that the interest in school life often lags and that classroom results are unsatisfactory. To meet this situation the section rooms of entering pupils consist of small groups, usually not more than thirty pupils in a group.

The business of the "section teacher" is not merely to see to attendance and issue monthly reports, but to act as a "committee-on-the-whole" in all matters pertaining to the welfare and school progress of these thirty pupils—to fulfil the functions of the former eighth-grade teacher. In so far as is possible this teacher retains charge of this group of pupils through the ensuing terms. Owing to the wide area from which high-school students come and the burdensome duties of the teachers, homes have not been visited so extensively as we wish. But we plan to give to teachers in charge of entering pupils one less daily period of teaching so as to enable

them to have time to visit homes and consult with the former as well as the present teachers of their pupils. We have the eighth-grade teachers send to us a confidential record card for each of the entering pupils. This card gives the name and address of the pupil, the parent's name and place of business, with the kind of business specified. It gives the pupil's final grades in English and arithmetic. Former teachers are asked to state any special aptitudes of the pupil (such as music, art, etc.), and to give any other information concerning the pupil or home conditions that will prove helpful to high-school teachers. This card bears no relation to the selection of studies, but is kept in the files of the high-school teacher to whom the pupil is assigned.

Whether a school system be organized on the "six-and-six plan" or on the "eight-and-four plan," better continuity of the educational process for each pupil is highly desirable. The high-school principal must move away from the notion that he is administering a separate academy for the benefit of those pupils who survive the grades or for the members of the upper high-school classes who "can do" high-school work. He must give to each pupil the fundamental as well as the special education best suited to his needs. Moreover, he must interest himself in the supplementary education and in the vocational training of those of high-school age who are not reaching the high school or are leaving it prematurely. In the opinion of the writer, nothing can join the principals of high and grammar schools more closely in a common comprehension of their joint responsibility than their efforts to aid their superintendent in the solution of these problems.

We are trying to make our new pupils feel "at home." A social "get-together" affair of all first-year girls was held this term, and a similar affair is planned for the boys. The gymnasium with the informal character of its surroundings, the stage and the open floor space, makes possible a program

that is attractive, consisting of group games, music, special "stunts" by pupils on the stage, words of welcome from teachers, and a little something to eat. The arrangements for these gatherings is simplified by the fact that these same groups meet in gymnasium classes. This gives ready opportunity for committees to meet and plan for such an affair. The directors in the boys' gymnasium have emphasized team-contests among the various room groups of boys, especially in basket-ball. The interest taken in this form of intramural athletics, in which all can participate, has added to the attractiveness of school life for these boys at the outset of their high-school career, without introducing some of the deleterious influences which too often accompany interscholastic games.

To say that much in the way of community service is expected of the public high school is but a truism in these days when every high school in the land has been a veritable dynamic center of war work. Noteworthy results have been attained in Liberty Loan campaigns, work for the Red Cross, the Y. M. C. A., the Girls' Patriotic League, the recent United War Work Campaign, and in numerous other enterprises. If the community had not already in the days before the war looked to the high school—the apex of the local school system—for great energy and strong support in community efforts, it does so now. This public attitude is just. High-school pupils have received not less than eight years of free education, and the public has a right to expect a return. Moreover, the frank acceptance of the implied responsibility by secondary-school teachers and their classes will constitute a great educational gain. To become useful citizens, pupils must feel that they are actually living and serving in the present, not merely preparing to live in the future. So far as our local high school is concerned, the war seems to have brought nearer a result toward which the school authorities have been working.

The numerous civic responsibilities which students may assume in even normal times may frequently correlate closely with the usual secondary curriculum. For example, shortly before the war a student campaign raised money for a great city organ in the high-school auditorium. This campaign was managed entirely by the officers of our student council in co-operation with the members of the local Rotary Club. The sum of \$4,400 was raised in one week by the sale of tags and the securing of larger subscriptions by the students. Not long ago the high-school Civic Club studied the city ordinances and prepared a pamphlet for popular distribution. This was issued by the Chamber of Commerce in co-operation with the Woman's Club. It contains the ordinances which concern most intimately the daily conduct of the citizens. They are grouped under the headings: health, the street department, the police department, and the fire department. The need for the booklet was discovered by the Woman's Club when promoting the work of the Junior Civic League in the elementary schools. The members of the League, on being instructed to observe the city ordinances or laws, raised the query, "What are the laws of the city?" The secretary of the Chamber of Commerce appealed to the high-school Civic Club for help in compiling the laws in a simplified form. This was done by a teacher and his pupils after interviews with the secretaries of the various departments. The material was submitted to the city attorney for his criticism before being printed. At his suggestion various legal maxims were interspersed among the simpler statements of the ordinances.

Commercial classes frequently do clerical work of a civic character, such as copying lists for the board of education, making card indexes for the draft boards, and sending out form letters for the Red Cross and other charities. Students have charge of the stockroom from which our schoolbooks are issued. They have assisted in the bookkeeping operations of the school lunchroom and the school bank.

Many teachers have felt that these civic undertakings—particularly war enterprises—are a departure from the “regular” work of the school. But has not this feeling been due to the amount of time and conscious effort always necessary in planning a new matter? We must acknowledge the beneficial results that have come from the recent enlivening of school work. It has been given motive by being related to results that are immediately worth while. When such correlation gets beyond its initial stages, there may be recognized methods of leading pupils into common enterprises and individual activities by which the community is served.

It has been a tradition with us to maintain the highest possible standard of excellence on those occasions when the public comes into contact with our work. In the commencement exercises, which occur twice yearly, we attempt always to give an impression of a high order of excellence. The student speakers are few and our best. The outside orator is chosen because his utterances will elevate and sustain the highest educational ideals. On this occasion the president of the board of education and the superintendent of schools always address the public. This carries the impression that the school system here comes into vital contact with the people. The music—choral and instrumental—is so good that this feature alone has acquired for the school and city an enviable reputation.

The musical aspect of our work is reinforced by an annual concert, one of the best artistic events of the year. Special attention is given to the music of the daily school assembly exercises. In them the best in school music is our aim. Parents and visitors attend when there are special programs. This is where citizens most frequently see the school in action, so to speak.

Our motive in organizing an alumni association has been not merely to cement friendships and associations formed in

school, but to make use of the loyalty of alumni in creating a sustaining public sentiment in behalf of high ideals in education in the city. An alumni association should be much more than a "get-together" club. It should be the means of creating a large and influential group of citizens who favor a liberal policy toward the schools.

The public high school is peculiarly representative of the whole school system, in the sense that the schools are judged very largely by what its pupils do and by what its institutional activities are. The high school ought to be in method as well as in form an integral part of the system which comprehends the administration of the "grades." Because the high school is a well-organized entity composed of the educated youth of a community, it has a civic responsibility that should be well recognized.